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ABSTRACT

Despite the field's growth, development, and maturity, in many ways the typical psychologist in the schools in little better off than a quarter century ago. Presently school psychology positions rest primarily on the shaky bedrock of financial and legislative considerations rather than perceived need. Following marketing strategies can enhance the indispensability of school psychologist by taking on two challenges. The first way is by convincing the public that psychological products are of value relative to the cost, particularly relative to the cost of not having services such as school-based prevention of crime and substance abuse. The second challenge is to convince the public that we should be the exclusive "distributor" of these services as compared to another profession. Four key recommendations relative to these challenges are: (1) to "downsize" school psychology's definition to make it more focused and narrow reflecting most needed services; (2) a call for psychology to look at the general effectiveness of "products and services" and question whether they work; (3) to market school psychology so that people know what it is and what school psychologists do in such a way that the message sticks; and (4) to enhance networking and development of community contacts. (JBJ)

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Chapter Eighteen

Turning Imperfection into Perfection: Some Advice for Making Psychology Indispensable in the Schools

Frederic J. Medway

Once upon a time, a husband and wife who wanted for nothing, loved best among their riches a beautiful diamond which was beyond equal. One day they discovered that the diamond had met with an accident and sustained a deep scratch. They searched everywhere for a craftsman who could repair the scratch, yet none could be found. After some time, a simple artist who had heard of their dilemma promised that there was a way to return their diamond to its original beauty. Using superb skill, the artist engraved a lovely rosebud round the imperfection, and the scratch on the diamond became the stem of the rosebud.[1]

As in this story, there are many leaders in school psychology, especially those of my generation, who feel that the field in which they have invested so much and worked so hard to nurture has yet to fulfill its promise. The alarming fact is that, despite the field's growth, development, and maturity, in many ways, the typical psychologist in the schools is little better off than a quarter century ago. The role and function studies continue to echo the same message: school psychologists do too much testing, diagnosing, classifying, and work with special education populations and not enough consultation, systems change, child advocacy, and service to all children (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 1995). More alarmingly, it is not that these latter services are viewed as unnecessary. Rather, in schools across the county, these functions have been taken over by those without adequate backgrounds in normal psychological theory and child development and by those with little exposure to the school as a unique social system.

The problems, however, run far deeper than our unfortunate transformation from the applied psychology visions of Witmer and Gesell to the gatekeepers of special education services. Salaries reflect those of classroom teachers much more than senior administrators with comparable degrees. Those who stay in the profession are highly subject to dissatisfaction at best and burnout at worst. As a consequence, compared to many other fields such as business, medicine, engineering, and clinical psychology; graduate school applications are modest compared to the enormous popularity of the undergraduate psychology major. Males and minorities are diminishing in representation, choosing more lucrative and higher status careers than education.

Similar points have been made in the literature before, although they still bear repeating. A recent survey of University of South Carolina (USC) doctoral and specialist school psychology graduates adds some further sobering thoughts. Many who graduated from our APA accredited during its 30 year existence have not maintained

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APA or NASP memberships, do not subscribe to journals not included as part of their association memberships, do not do any research, and are not active in their communities by serving on boards or providing volunteer services.

The very nature of the title of this volume, *Making Psychology in the Schools Indispensable*, underscores the fact that, as school psychology marks its centennial, there is some question regarding the perceived value and need for our services. This paper argues that we have ignored a number of simple principles which might increase our indispensability, and have mislead ourselves into believing that the value of having psychologists in the schools would be apparent to any reasonable citizen.

Presently school psychology positions rest primarily on the shaky bedrock of financial and legislative considerations rather than perceived need. Psychologist-pupil ratios depend on school finances and the need to be in compliance with state and federal laws. Accordingly, if financial exigencies emerge or laws change, school psychologists' positions are threatened. With jobs tied to legislation, we risk that when we advocate for the maintenance or expansion of these laws we may be seen by outsiders as self-serving rather than impartially committed to these principles. We share this in common with lawyers who argue against limits to civil damage awards in auto accident cases. The public cannot convincingly make an attribution that school psychology is truly committed to children when an alternative cause, financial gain, is present.

To be indispensable is to be necessary, needed, and not easily neglected or set aside. One might argue that, unlike some professions, there is absolutely nothing that school psychologists do that is perceived as indispensable in and of itself. Some of this may be attributed to the public's lack of confidence in public education, in general, to address society's ills. Even in a pro-education climate, the dilemma for school psychology is that it does not exclusively control any resources which the public absolutely needs. All of our services can and are provided by others, including different types of psychologists, counselors, mental health workers, and clergy. That is not to say that we cannot provide these services better. There is just no objective evidence that we can, nor is the public likely to believe the evidence if it only comes from us. By contrast, for example, the medical establishment controls the most effective, life-saving medicines and surgical procedures. The only thing we exclusively control is our title and that, in itself, is simply not enough to make us indispensable.

The task we are faced with then is how to turn the current imperfections of our field into desired perfections, knowing full well that many of these imperfections will not completely disappear. Rather, potential liabilities can become, with careful analysis, like our scratched diamond, potential strengths.

In the absence of resource control then, how do we convince the public that certain psychological services are indispensable? Rather than assume that the public will recognize the necessity of these services we should start assuming that they will not; consequently, we must proactively convince them of the value of these services and solicit them as allies advocating for the profession. It is important for us to identify those predisposed to be our allies, let them know what we are doing, and seek their support. Just as many citizens demand safe school buses, uncrowded classrooms, music appreciation, and internet access so too must there be a support base for psychological services in the schools for all children, not just the exceptional ones.

To accomplish this, it will be absolutely necessary to start effectively marketing what we do and how well we do it. Although a potentially daunting task, we can learn much from the corporate sector. It was not that long ago that names like Nike, Fuji, Sony, Wal-Mart, Snapple,

Sprint, and others were unknown, and Keds, Motorola, and Sears were virtual monopolies.

Following marketing strategies then, the indispensability of psychologists in schools, can be enhanced by taking on two challenges. The first challenge is to convince the public that our product(s) are of value relative to the cost, particularly relative to the cost of not having the services such as school-based services to prevent crime and substance abuse. The second challenge is to convince the public that we should be the exclusive "distributor" of these services as compared to another profession. The key is to start to take control of our own destiny and not allow it to be subject to outside forces such as the political winds. We have been too slow in seeking our own "empowerment" and "self efficacy." This article offers four key recommendations relative to these challenges.

Recommendation One: The "Downsizing" of School Psychology

If you asked 100 people what the Coca-Cola company produces, most would say "Coke" or one of the diet coke products. A fewer number would say "Sprite." Very few would probably say "Minute Maid Orange Juice" even though this is one of the company's staples. In any event people have a vision of the company. Now, if you asked 100 school psychologists to define the field or tell what they do you would get 100 answers varying to a greater or lesser degree, and, in fact there is no widely accepted definition (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984). The fact is that because school psychologists have been unable, unwilling, or uninterested in offering a standard description of the field, the public, by and large, is unable to say what a school psychologist does or to give a definition that doesn't rankle someone in our field.

One may wonder if part of the problem in discipline definition is that the field, as currently practiced, incorporates too much. Both the Handbook of School Psychology (Reynolds & Gutkin, 1987) and Best Practices in School Psychology (Thomas & Grimes, 1995) each are well over 1000 pages long and offer myriad roles for psychologists in schools. The prevailing training zeitgeist has been for students to choose the role which best fits their interest within the constraints of their academic setting. Role and function differ widely across states, localities, schools, and individuals.

This lack of definition and diffusion leads one to raise a new and radical notion, namely the question of whether school psychology should be downsized to make it more focused and narrow to reflect the most needed (not necessarily requested) services. Although one might argue that the present assessment emphasis already is too narrowly focused, the present recommendation would involve generating a consensus among trainers, practitioners, and the public as to what types of services are most indispensable to child welfare. If special education mandates were to disappear, what types of services would the public and field demand? Before one can address how to make psychological services indispensable, one must describe indispensable services. To this writer's knowledge this has yet to be done on any scale. In fact, just the sheer act of such polling will serve to make the available services salient. Such an approach also partially solve an enduring frustration of school psychology faculty, namely, how to fit so much into the little time available in a students' program. In short, it may be necessary for school psychology to define its share of the mental health market and spin off domains in which it is unable to provide comprehensive training.

Recommendation Two: The Sensible "Evaluation" of School Psychology

Psychology, as a Science, is continually developing its products, be that test refinement, intervention improvement, or the improvement of service delivery. Typically, this product

development appears in professional journals which are not even thoroughly read by most subscribers. Not surprisingly those who actually deliver services derive little help from these journals, most of which only survive because of institutional subscriptions.

This second recommendation is a call for psychology to look at the general effectiveness of our "products and services" and ask if they work. We already have a modest history of this already in our literature reviews and summaries. Several studies have used meta-analysis to examine the impact of class size, grade retention, teacher expectations, and consultation, to name a few, on various indices. Meta-analysis, by combining data across studies, speaks to the types of questions that consumers want to know. To illustrate, meta-analysis shows that participants in parent education groups improve more than 60% compared to nonparticipants (Medway, 1989). Such data is valuable in demonstrating to the public in understandable ways that psychological services have an impact.

Not only will school psychology need to do more of this generic consumer-based evaluation and develop a pool of successful case studies, but it will be incumbent on the field to communicate these results to consumers in easily available and consumable forms. The NASP handouts of "Resources for Educators, Parents and Students" appearing in each Communique are an excellent example of this. Priority also should be given to the development of CD-ROMs which could be housed in school libraries which (a) describe the psychological services available, (b) indicate the effectiveness of various approaches, and (c) indicate effectiveness moderators.

Recommendation Three:
Blitz "School Psychology"

It is well known to all of us that the more one hears or sees a stimulus the better it is remembered. Successful products have jingles, logos, mottoes, renowned spokespersons, etc. which strengthen the bond between the stimulus (product perception) and response (product valuation). The infamous "payola" scandals associated with 1950s Rock and Roll disk-jockeys were due to the fact that if record producers could just get stations to play their songs (almost irrespective of the tune and lyrics) sales would go up. Unfortunately, citizen's today rarely hear the school psychology tune unless they are a parent of a handicapped child.

Accordingly, in order to make psychology indispensable in the schools one must make people aware that school psychology exists, and do so before they need these services so that those provided are not exclusively remedial and problem-focused. Everyday citizens are not the only ones unfamiliar with school psychology. Discouraging is the number of prospective graduate student applicants who tell us they did not learn about school psychology as a profession until late in their college careers.

School psychology can and should take an important lesson from the business sector in increasing the public's awareness of school psychology (independent of the issue of exactly what services psychologists provide). To this end all psychologists in schools need to be concerned with promoting school psychology, building a positive image for psychologists who work in schools, and actively doing public outreach. Psychologists have paid a price (as have teachers) by staying confined within the school walls and assuming that their services would be known and valued. Because actual services reach only a small number of families in a given school it is very important that the total school and community be educated about the availability of school-based psychological services. If psychological services are threatened with elimination one cannot rely solely on the families of exceptional children to support service reinstatement. At all school levels psychologists must be visible, approachable, and

accessible. This includes teaching in psychology classes in high schools and serving as student mentors, and the development of units and lectures on "school psychology" for relevant undergraduate classes. Finally, priority should be placed, at local and national levels, on developing media contacts and media referrals so that psychological interventions in schools come to public attention by way of the print and visual media. And, psychologists should always identify themselves as experts who work in the schools.

Recommendation Four:
The "Personal Touch"

Business and sales personnel, and psychologists in private practice, have long recognized the value of networking and the development of community contacts. These community contacts take a variety of forms and include (a) civic and service clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions clubs; (b) commerce-related organizations such as local Chambers of Commerce, Better Business Bureaus, and Junior Achievement; (c) art, music, and cultural associations; (d) community service organizations such as United Way, Red Cross, Boy and Girl Scouts, and Special Olympics; (e) membership in religious congregations and social clubs; and (f) various volunteer activities such as Big Brother and Big Sister, Habitat for Humanity, and Common Cause. Still others are involved with various political organizations as candidates, active supporters, and polling place managers. In South Carolina, for example, the state school psychology association participates in the educational television fund-raiser, school psychology graduate students collect school supplies for homeless shelters and work with the local rape prevention center, and school psychology faculty have played key roles in the campaigns of politicians for U. S. Senator and state superintendent of education.

The benefits of community involvement as a vehicle for enhancing the public's perception of the necessity of school psychology practitioners are numerous. The psychological literature strongly shows that having contact with diverse others and working with them on cooperative teams is a key vehicle for increasing others' knowledge and liking. Too often, however, educators tend to interact with similar professionals and disregard the benefits, both personally and professionally, of interactions with others in different lines of work who too are concerned with serving their communities and addressing social problems. For example, Rotary International, a worldwide organization of more than 1.2 million businesspersons and a major provider of scholarships for special education teachers, has local task forces which address substance abuse, literacy, and hunger, just to name a few. This is an organization which actively seeks professionals in all occupations and does more than just "meet and eat." In Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, local Rotarians developed a program which involves local businesspersons serving as reading tutors to disadvantaged children. This program now has been adopted on a national scale. By joining groups such as Rotary and others listed above psychologists who work in schools can contribute needed expertise and directly show community leaders that they have indispensable skills to contribute and that school psychologists are the best trained to deliver these services.

In conclusion, in answering the question of how to make psychological services indispensable in schools, the perspective adopted is to change the general public's perception of the value of these services. This includes not only those who have family members in schools but others who have no personal reason to support educational or mental health initiatives. This will be important increasingly as the population of the United States ages and communities struggle to convince taxpayers to support these services. Four recommendations, owing much to the marketing

literature, were offered. These include the necessity of school psychology developing a market share of the mental health field and coming to grips with the current role and function diffusion; of continually evaluating its products, effectively communicating these evaluations to consumers, and of not assuming that the benefits of these services are obvious; of telling people who we are and what we do, and doing it so that the message sticks; and by taking active parts in the ongoing efforts to solve community problems alongside those we need to support us so that like-minded people in diverse occupations can see first-hand that psychology in the schools has an indispensable place. Such recommendations rarely have appeared in our literature although, to this writer's thinking, they make sense and are long overdue. As the opening story illustrates, sometime dilemmas and imperfections can be solved with simple, yet creative, answers.

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Footnote

[1]Based on a story by Barbara Drossin and Sarah Sager.